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Continuity and discontinuity during the transition to the Bronze Age in Crete. Reassessing the 1923-4 Upper and Lower Houses in the Central Court at Knossos

ABSTRACT

In two papers presented at the *Cretological* in 1987 and 2001, Sinclair Hood drew attention to significant discontinuities in ceramic and architectural development at Knossos between the Neolithic and EM I, and suggested these might be the result of the arrival of new cultural groups, possibly from overseas. This paper, which is dedicated to Sinclair Hood, returns to this question by presenting results from a reassessment of the stratigraphy and phasing of the Lower and Upper Houses, excavated in 1923-4 in the area of the later Central Court. A new interpretation of their stratigraphy and phasing is presented and their relationship to preceding phases explored. The paper concludes, with Hood, in favour of a hiatus and interruption in the long-term development of the site, but dates this within EM I and associates its reoccupation with an intrusive intra-island group with different cultural traditions.

KEYWORDS: Neolithic, Early Bronze I, architecture, pottery, stratigraphy, legacy excavations

To the memory of Sinclair Hood

In a paper presented at the 6th International Cretological Congress, Sinclair Hood highlighted a discontinuity in ceramic development at Knossos between the latest Neolithic, as then understood, and an EM I phase defined by the Palace Well (Hood 1990). Comparison indicated “a relatively sharp break in the tradition of the pottery”, “apparent in the fabric of vases, in their

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shape, and in their finish and decoration”, which are all new (Hood 1990, 369). Hood suggested that these “radical and it seems abrupt changes” could indicate that “the Early Minoan I period in Crete may have been inaugurated by people from overseas”, with the survival of certain aspects of the Neolithic tradition implying mixture with an indigenous population (1990, 371). However, as Hood noted, a lack of more decisive evidence (e.g. burial, architecture) meant that this suggestion could only be made tentatively (1990, 371). Hood returned to the question in a discussion of the Upper and Lower Houses excavated by Arthur Evans and Duncan Mackenzie in 1923-4 in the Central Court (2006; Evans 1928). He noted that while Evans considered both buildings to belong to “substantially the same concluding phase of the Upper Neolithic”, Mackenzie’s own view was that the Upper House was EM I in date and that “emphatic alterations” in the technology of its architecture and the latest pottery associated with its walls indicated the arrival of newcomers at Knossos. These will hereafter be referred to as Building J (“Lower House”) and Building K (“Upper House”), following a previously proposed extension of the alphabetic terminology used by John Evans for buildings in his 1957-60 Central Court excavations (Tomkins 2007, 42, 45).

This paper explores continuity and discontinuity during the Chalcolithic (or Final Neolithic)-EB I transition at Knossos, drawing on the results of a reassessment of the stratigraphy, formation and phasing of the John Evans excavations (1957-60; 1969-70) ahead of their final publication. (Re)excavations of the area investigated in 1923-4 in 1959 (Trench E; Evans 1964, 134), 1969 (Trench M) and 1970 (Trench P; Evans 1971: 97-8, fig. 1) provide a basis to re-evaluate and integrate the 1923-4 excavations with the results of later excavations in the Central Court by John Evans (1957-60; 1969-70; Evans 1964; 1971). This reassessment, combined with detailed reappraisal of pottery groups and radiocarbon dates, has distinguished a sequence of 15 Neolithic-EM I phases (i.e. Knossos I, Knossos II etc.) defined in terms of their stratigraphy, formation, pottery and architecture (Table 1; Tomkins 2020; 2023). Most are ‘site-wide’ in the sense that they occur in multiple excavated areas, but some are specific to certain areas. With only a proportion of the site sampled, this new phasing system should be treated as a provisional framework of understanding to be adapted in the light of future discoveries.

DEFINING CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY AT NEOLITHIC-EM I KNOSSOS

A century of excavations across the Kephala hill at Knossos have produced a large body of evidence for occupation, spanning the seventh to fourth millennia BC (A. Evans 1928; J. Evans 1964; Tomkins 2007; 2008; Efstratiou et al. 2013). This evidence provides ample scope to trace stratigraphical and cultural continuity and discontinuity. Commonly, single or closely related episodes of activity form clusters of stratigraphical continuity, punctuated by periods of hiatus marked by interfaces exhibiting consolidation (i.e. hardening) and/or erosion (smoothing), sometimes followed by one or more naturally-formed layers (typically soft in consistency, thin and scarce in cultural material) that signify hiatus, whether local or site-wide. Cultural discontinuity may be measured by comparing cultural forms and practices (e.g. typology/technology of material culture, architecture etc.) either side of a stratigraphical discontinuity. By combining measures of stratigraphical and cultural continuity/discontinuity, it may be assessed whether stratigraphical discontinuities occur within periods of cultural homogeneity, defined

Knossos Site Phases	Equivalent to Tomkins 2007	Approximate timeline (BC)	Proposed Chronological Phasing
IX	FN IA	4600	Final Neolithic (FN) IA
X	FN IB	4450	Final Neolithic (FN) IB
XI	FN II	?4300? ?4200?	Final Neolithic (FN) (transitional FN I/II)
XII	FN III	?4200? ?4000?	Final Neolithic (FN) IIA
XIII	FN IV	?3800?	Final Neolithic (FN) IIB
XIV		?3650/3500?	Transitional FN II/EB I
XV	EM I	2950/2900	Early Minoan (EM) I/IIA

Table 1. Knossos, Neolithic – Early Minoan I phases and chronology.

by the recurrence of cultural forms and practice through stratigraphical space (i.e. site-wide phases), or between such periods, where differences in cultural forms and practices, either side of a stratigraphical discontinuity, are sufficient to indicate a juxtaposition of different phases. Comparison of stratigraphical and cultural discontinuities between different trench sequences across the site suggests that stratigraphical hiatuses are typically local rather than site-wide in nature, and thus indicative of spatial shifts in deposition within an active site rather than its abandonment (Tomkins 2008; 2023). However, sometimes (e.g. Knossos IX-X) the evidence for hiatus is sufficiently widespread to indicate a period of abandonment.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN CHALCOLITHIC AND EM I PHASING ON CRETE

In the 20 years since the re-definition of the Cretan Final Neolithic (Chalcolithic) at Knossos (Tomkins 2007), several important developments have taken place.¹ First, and most impactful has been Todaro's repositioning and redating of Phaistos I-III from the end of the Cretan Neolithic, in the mid to late fourth millennium, to the fifth millennium BC (i.e. LN, FN I and FN II) (Todaro 2016,

¹ The recent claim that Knossos was abandoned by 4400 BC and lacks EN, MN and FN occupation (Bonga 2022) is not, alas, one of these positive developments. Quite apart from a litany of errors in its reception and citation of previous research on Neolithic Knossos, and its unfailingly unsympathetic attitude to previous work on Neolithic Crete, this paper presents a fictional view of the Knossos sequence, formed in the image of the author's preconceived ideas and misunderstandings rather than empirically-grounded insight into its stratigraphy and phasing.

316-7; 2019, 154 n. 26, 174-7).² While the full implications of this shift are still being worked through for the sites/assemblages conventionally seen as related to Neolithic Phaistos (e.g. Neroukourou, Eileithyia Cave, Gortyn Acropolis; Vagnetti and Belli 1978), it is already clear that most of them also find close parallels in the period before 4000 BC (cf. Evans 1971; Vagnetti and Belli 1978; Tomkins 2007, table 1.6).

In the case of Knossos, five site phases may be assigned to FN (Chalcolithic) according to comparative assessment of their pottery groups and available radiocarbon dates (Table 1, Knossos IX-XIII). While this new system of phasing closely relates to the five FN sub-phases presented in 2007 (Tomkins 2007), improved understanding of the nature, formation and phasing of the stratigraphy has deepened resolution and clarified the selection of representative pottery groups. Further comparative work has improved the seriation of these groups, enabling better integration with sites/assemblages in Crete and beyond. Such links, combined with a better understanding of the character of the phases at Knossos, support an amended phase terminology to refer to phases previously termed FN II, FN III and FN IV, which harmonises better with systems in use in the Aegean and East Mediterranean (Table 1; cf. Tomkins 2020). Radiocarbon and comparative typological evidence suggest that FN IA (Knossos IX), was underway by c. 4600 BC and FN IB (Knossos X) by c. 4450/4400 BC. After this point, while radiocarbon data may be lacking, frequentation of the site continues (Tomkins 2007; *contra* Bonga 2022). FN IB is followed by a transitional FN I-II phase, for which the new term FN IC is proposed (Table 1, FN IC, Knossos XI; formerly FN II, Tomkins 2007, 35-8). FN IC is followed by a newly redefined FN II period, composed of early (FN IIA, Knossos XII; formerly FN III, Tomkins 2007, 38-41) and late (FN IIB, Knossos XIII; formerly FN IV, Tomkins 2007, 41-4) phases, both attested by multiple building horizons (Table 1). Certain similarities between the buildings and pottery of Knossos XII (FN IIA) and Phaistos III could suggest a start to FN IIA around 4200 BC. General comparisons for Knossos XIII (FN IIB) suggest it dates after c. 4000/3900 BC.

The beginning of the EBA in the Aegean has similarly shifted back in time, from the low chronology (i.e. 3100/3000 BC) proposed by Manning (1995) back to the high chronology (c. 3500 BC) previously advocated (Warren and Hankey 1989, 122). In other Aegean regions the period after 3500 BC and before 3200/3100 BC has variously been termed the 'proto-EB I', 'transitional EB I' or early EB I (Coleman 2011; Coleman and Facorellis 2016; Tsirtsoni 2020), while in the Levant it is the EB IA (e.g. Nigro et al. 2019) and in Egypt the formative Naqada II. In Crete, an early EM I phase dating to the period after c. 3500 BC is suggested by the pottery from Partira, Lebena Tomb II Stage F, and other groups assigned to a 'Subneolithic' phase of EM I (Evans 1921, 38, 56-64; Mortzos 1972; Warren and Hankey 1989; Tsipopoulou 1992; Warren 2004; Tomkins 2007, 14, table 1.6, 44-8; Todaro 2019, 128, 198-200).

CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY AT CHALCOLITHIC AND EM I KNOSSOS

A distinctive characteristic of FN (Chalcolithic) occupation at Knossos, emerging already early in the period (i.e. FN IB, Knossos X), is the disappearance of village-like habitation areas, formed of

² Bonga's claim to priority in the redating of Phaistos would have more credibility were it not being made six years after Todaro first published her redating of the site (Bonga 2022; cf. Todaro 2016; 2019).

clusters of proximately situated, contemporaneous dwellings, in favour of a low-density, shifting pattern of habitation focused on isolated buildings, some of which were large (e.g. Building G, >100 m²; Tomkins 2023). This pattern, which also occurs in FN II, is documented in the two largest exposures in the Central Court (450 m²) and West Court (c. 65 m²), where the absence of contemporary neighbours suggests a maximum of 1-4 buildings on the hilltop at any one time (Tomkins 2023). Stratigraphical discontinuities between occupation episodes could represent periodic abandonments of the hill, albeit short given the cultural continuities that may be traced between episodes (i.e. pottery types, traditions of production). On this basis, a population of 0-40 people may be estimated (Tomkins 2023). It should be emphasised that at no point is there evidence to support the existence of the large and populous nucleated settlement claimed from unphased artefact distributions (*contra* Whitelaw 2012; Legarra-Herrero 2019; see Tomkins 2023; also 2008: 27-40, esp. 35-6).

BUILDING J AND THE FN-EM I TRANSITION

The period after FN IIB (Knossos XIII) and before EM IIA early (Knossos XVI) is difficult to assess (Tomkins 2023; in press). In the Central Court sequence, phase XIII is followed by two superimposed buildings excavated in 1923-4 (i.e. Buildings J and K; Mackenzie 1923, 42-4; 1924; A. Evans 1928, 1-21). Building J, the lower of the two, preserved the more complete wall plan, indicating an unusually large (>150 m²), multi-roomed structure with well-defined northern, eastern and southeastern limits (Fig. 1). Above the eastern part of Building J, at the interface with the preparation layer for the (now missing) Central Court paving, were the poorly preserved traces of a later building, Building K (Fig. 2; Mackenzie 1923, 42-4; 1924, 1-2). During the 1923 season, a red earth floor was noted in the eastern part of the excavated area and the material above it assigned to what Evans termed Stratum B. During the 1924 season, which sought to clarify the walls of Building J, pottery and finds were separated according to units defined by the different internal spaces of Building J (e.g. Fig. 1, Area 5, Area 6 etc.; Mackenzie 1924, 11; Evans

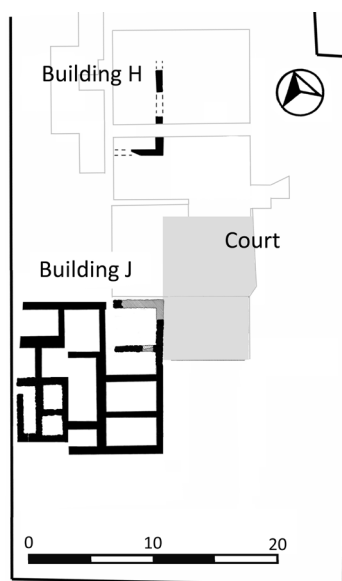


Fig. 1. Central Court, Buildings H and J.

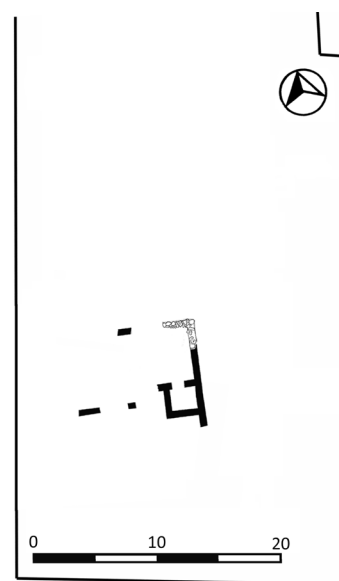


Fig. 2. Central Court, Building K.

boxes 807-832). These units were collectively assigned to a single phase of deposition (Stratum A), which the excavators associated with the use of Building J. Both strata were c. 0.25 m thick within a total depth below the surface of c. 0.5 m (A. Evans 1928, 8). Although no excavation photographs or stratigraphical sections are available from the 1923-4 excavations, John Evans' innovative programme of re-excitation in 1959, 1969 and 1970, combined with Mackenzie's original notes and retained materials, provides a basis for reassessment.

ORIENTATION?

Hood (2006) has drawn attention to significant discrepancies between Mackenzie's description of Buildings J and K, produced around the time of excavation (Mackenzie 1923; 1924), and the account subsequently published by Evans (A. Evans 1928: 1-21). One concerns the orientation of the two buildings, with the published plan (A. Evans 1928, fig. 8a) showing Building J oriented broadly parallel to the later Palace, but Mackenzie's sketch plan in the 1924 daybook showing it at an oblique angle (Mackenzie 1924, 11; Hood 2006, fig. 3). Unusually, it is Mackenzie's plan that is in error. That Building J shared the same general alignment as the Palace, as depicted in the published plan, is shown (1) by an early version of the Palace Plan in the BSA archives, produced in 1955-6 by Unwin and Blatchford when walls from both buildings were visible in the Central Court; and (2) by plans and photographs made during John Evans' reinvestigation of the two buildings in 1959, 1969 and 1970 (Figs 3-4).

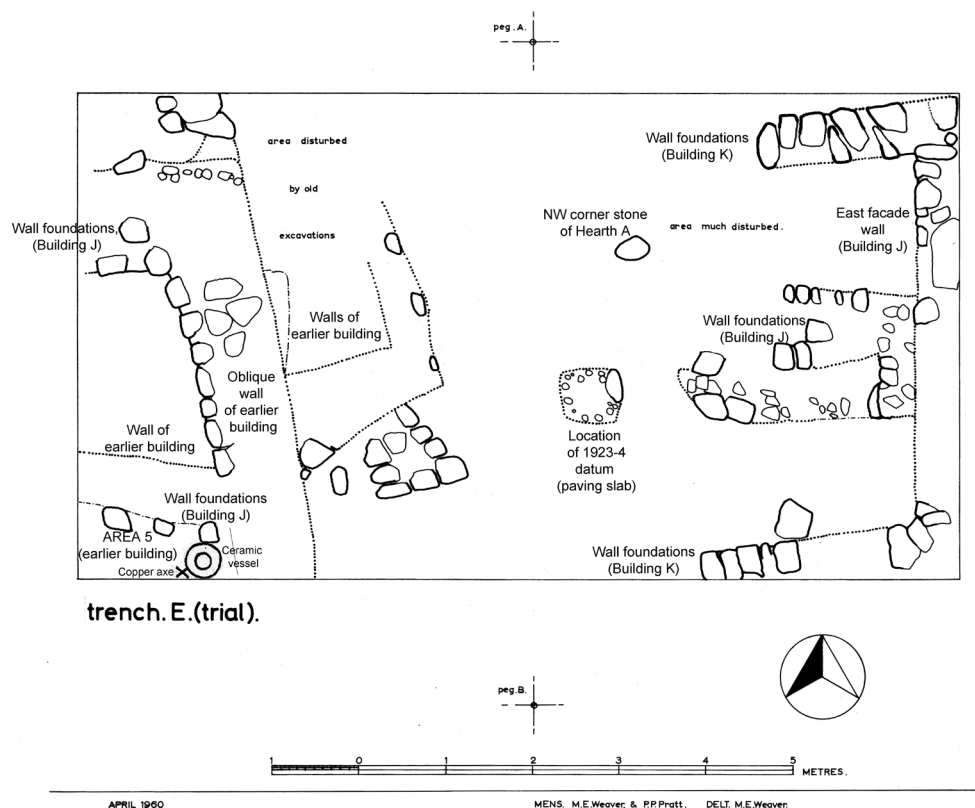


Fig. 3. Trench E, 1959. Features revealed following removal of backfill from the northeastern area of Buildings J and K (courtesy of BSA Archive).

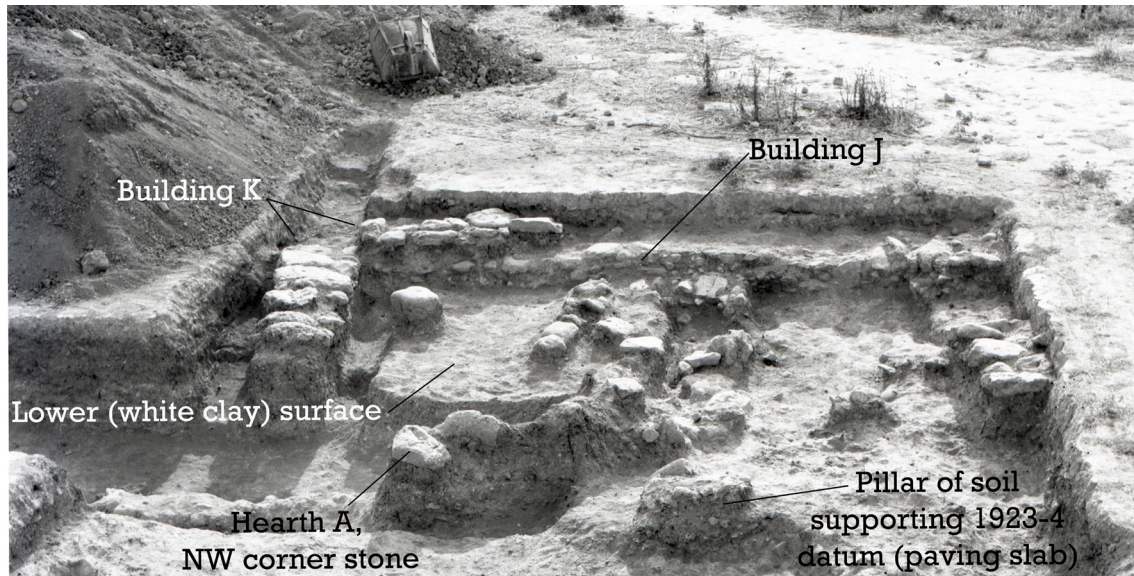


Fig. 4. Photograph (1959) looking east across Trench E towards the east wall of Building J.
Note (left) the superimposed walls of Building K (courtesy of BSA Archive).

ONE BUILDING OR TWO?

A second discrepancy noted by Hood concerns whether the walls of Building J denote a single unitary building, as concluded by Mackenzie, or two separate residential units (Houses A and B), as suggested by Evans and rendered on the published plan (Hood 2006). Evans' interpretation was based on the presence of two large (c. 1 m²), rectangular hearths (Hearths A and B) in the areas enclosed by the northeastern and southeastern corners of Building J. Although Mackenzie and Evans interpreted these hearths as internal features of Building J, hearths of this form and size in Crete, notably those from Phaistos (phases II-III), normally occur in open-air settings, where they serve as foci for group commensality (Todaro 2019, 35-6). Moreover, at Phaistos these hearths occur in such close stratigraphical proximity to the foundation-walls of EM I buildings that it would be possible to assume that they were contemporary, were there not detailed stratigraphical documentation to show otherwise (Todaro 2019, fig. 1.16). Unfortunately, in the case of Knossos, the stratigraphical relationship of Hearths A and B to the walls and floors of Building J was not documented by section drawings in 1924. Did they form part of the use of Building J, as Mackenzie and Evans believed, or might they relate to open-air activity in this location before Building J was constructed?³

Clarification of this is provided by a photograph taken in 1959 after J. Evans' clearance of backfill from the northeast area of Building J (Fig. 4; J. Evans 1964, 134). This depicts a stratigraphy of walls, which conforms closely to Mackenzie's descriptions (1923, 44; 1924, 2). Thus, where the walls of Building J and K "coincide at their North end it is noticeable that the overlying and later wall [i.e. Building K] has its separate bedding of mud mortar and pebbles [0].10 [m] thick, which runs along the top of the earlier wall [i.e. Building J]" (1923, 44; A. Evans 1928, 8 n. 2).

³ I thank Simona Todaro for first raising this question in relation to the interpretation of Building J.

This earlier wall is said to be formed of a single course of stones laid above a foundation layer of small, rounded stones (Figs 3-4).

What is not made clear by Mackenzie, but evident from the photograph, is that the foundation layer of rounded stones, belonging to the east wall of Building J, runs over an earlier deposit, which formed above the white clay prepared floor associated with Hearth A (Figs. 3-4; cf. A. Evans 1928, fig. 8b). Thus, as at Phaistos, use of Hearth A was open-air and earlier than the building that follows. Indeed, excavation below Hearth A (1969 Trench M) indicates that it is merely the latest in a series of rectangular platform-hearths in this location. Study of the pottery recovered from the vicinity of Hearths A and B supports their assignation to this earlier episode. Evans' Stratum A is not therefore a homogenous 'use' deposit associated with the use of Building J, but a heterogeneous series of anterior episodes of deposition, into which the walls/foundations of Building J were set. With Hearths A and B now assigned to an earlier phase, there is no basis for Evans' functional subdivision of Building J.

THE FLOOR OF BUILDING J?

During the 1923 season, Mackenzie and Evans identified a distinctive floor at a depth of c. 0.25 m below their datum on a Central Court paving slab. Evans' detailed description of a sample of this floor notes "a thin layer of red earth (c. 0.8 cm)" above a layer of "pale prepared clay" (c. 1.5 cm; A. Evans 1928, 8 n. 1). Traces of a second clay preparation layer of white clay, also c. 1.5 cm thick, were observed above the red earth layer, indicating that the floor had been re-laid. Although they associated this "red earth" floor with Building K, this was by default owing to their (erroneous) conclusion that the lower (white clay) surface, together with hearths A and B, was the floor of Building J. With the lower floor now assigned to an earlier phase, the red earth floor becomes an obvious candidate for Building J. Although Evans claimed that this upper floor was "traceable throughout the greater part of the area explored" (A. Evans 1928, 8), Mackenzie's notebook suggests that it may only have been encountered in the east part of the building, in Area 2, where its measured elevation translates as 101.31 m (above sea-level), and Area 3. In the case of Area 2, no walls or foundation cuts associable to Building K were noted, making it difficult to see how it could be associated with the red earth floor. In Area 3, Mackenzie observed that the scantily preserved walls of Building K in places barely reached as far as the red earth floor (Mackenzie 1923), similarly undermining their association. The measured elevation of the red earth floor in Area 2 places it at an ideal height to be the floor of Building J, namely just above the top of the first stone (foundation) course of Building J and Hearth A (Fig. 4).

THE "STORE-CELLS"?

Two door-less, cellular spaces (Areas 5 and 6) and another to the southeast (Area 7) were cleared in 1924 below the level of the red earth floor in the central and southern parts of the building. Within these spaces cobbled flooring was encountered at the same approximate depth as other features assigned to Stratum A (A. Evans 1928, 14). Mackenzie's detailed description (1924, 9-10) of the cobbled flooring in Area 5 makes clear that it was constructed at the same time as its surrounding walls and that it was specially shaped to slope into a hollow basin (depth 0.2 m) at the centre of the space. In his publication, Evans associated these spaces with Building

J and interpreted them as “store-cells” forming part of “a system of small store-rooms” which “seems to anticipate the Magazines of later Palatial structures” (1928, 14-15, 18).

There are, however, strong reasons to question Evans’ association of these spaces and their contents with Building J. Areas 5 and 6 are notable for being primary deposits, comprising several, semi-complete ceramic vessels, a copper axe and a chisel in “red jasper” (Evans 1928, 14), seemingly formed during the catastrophic destruction of building. The retained sherd material includes several large, additional fragments of vessels, together with more fragmented, worn sherd material, potentially deriving from wall collapse (KSM Evans boxes 810-12). These semi-complete vessels and large sherds find their closest parallels in deposits assigned to Knossos XII (FN IIA; e.g. Evans 1928, 14, fig. 3, r), suggesting that they belong to an earlier building, over which Building J was built. Areas 5 and 6 formed west of and in association with a north-south wall, which is not only notably thicker than the walls of Building J but also oriented at a different angle. In thickness, construction and orientation the wall closely resembles the walls of Building G (Knossos XII). This reassessment would thus suggest a FN IIA date (c. 4250/4200-4000/3900 BC) for the copper axe from Area 5, making it one of the earliest metal objects known from Crete.

THE CHRONOLOGY (AND FUNCTION) OF BUILDING J?

This reassessment suggests that only the finds recovered above the red earth floor are potentially relevant to its period of use (i.e. Stratum B). Unfortunately, the retained pottery from 1923 (KSM Evans boxes 834-5) is a rather fragmented mixture of late FN/EM I and later material (i.e. MM III/LM, post-Minoan), the latter relating to subsequent episodes of formation in the area (i.e. laying of the Central Court paving; Evans’ Hellenic Shrine; A. Evans 1928, 5-8). Caution is required with the earlier component as excavation, as earlier levels were accidentally sampled in several places in 1923 (Mackenzie 1924, 2, 15). Regarding the late FN/EM I component, Evans observed that the sherds “show less of the traditional burnish and present a somewhat paler surface” with “incised decoration... even rarer and more superficial” (A. Evans 1928, 8). Mackenzie concluded that this pottery “was not really Neolithic in the true sense at all but sub-Neolithic or even initial Early Minoan I. In that case, it shows a very early phase in sub-Neolithic or Early Minoan I before the use of glaze paints on a light ground came in” (1924, 25-6; also 1).

A transitional or earliest EB I date for Knossos XIV would be supported by the character of certain sherds intrusive to Neolithic levels below Building J (e.g. dark grey mottled ware bowl rim; Fig. 6, a) or in its vicinity (e.g. red-on-buff painted wide-mouthed jug; (Tomkins 2007: fig. 1.16, 4). The only (semi-complete) vessel to be recovered from Stratum B (Fig. 5, a [with conjectures removed]; A. Evans 1928, fig. 3, x) has a form that could be compared to biconical (“lentoid”) pyxides, with sharply angled shoulder and short vertical neck, of early EM I type (cf. Knossos, Royal Road South: Warren 1972, 393 fig. 3; Lebena Tomb II: Warren 2004, 86-8; pls. 61, A [240]), but the presence of a spout otherwise renders it unique.

Parallels in Crete for the red earth floor of Building J, at least on current evidence, are generally EM in date. At Knossos, such floors occur in similarly aligned buildings of EM II and MM IA early date (Tomkins forthcoming; Momigliano and Wilson 1996, 47). They are also a feature of specific EM I-III buildings at Phaistos, where it is clear that the thin coating of “red earth” on the clay

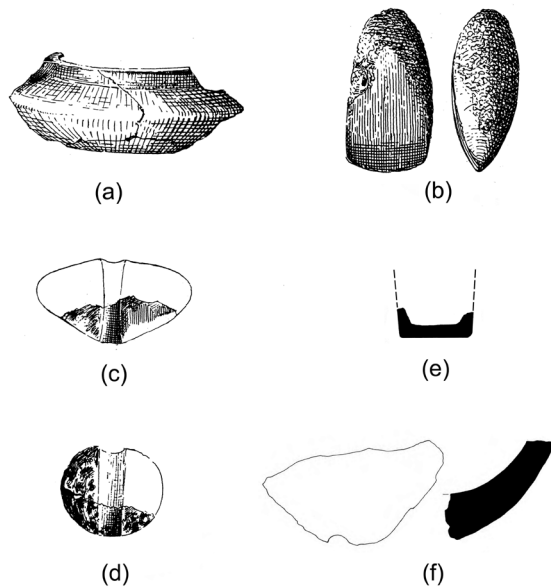


Fig. 5. Pottery and other finds from Building J.



Fig. 6. Dark grey mottled ware bowl from Area 6.

floor is red ochre (Todaro 2019, 29-32, 44, 50-2, 56, 144; tables I-II, IV, VII).⁴ Because the ochre is easily disturbed and removed by walking, necessitating regular relaying, such floors seem to have been reserved for buildings of special, communal importance (Todaro 2019, fig. 1.44; 2020).

More generally, a mid-fourth millennium BC date would be consistent with some more unusual finds from Building J. Thus, fragments of two stone vessels of possible early Egyptian (Predynastic-Dynasty I) type and material were recovered from deposits likely formed or disturbed during the construction of the building (Fig. 5, f and g; A. Evans 1928, figs. 6; 8a; Warren 1969, 106, 109 note 1; Hood 2006, 14; Phillips 2008, nos. 132-3). Two fragmentary mace-heads from Stratum B (Fig. 5, c and d; A. Evans 1928, 14; figs. 3, k and l; 5, b; 7) are of a type comparable to examples in fourth millennium BC contexts in Egypt (Hood 2006: 14-15; also pl. 1; cf. A. Evans 1928: 15) and the Levant (Sebbane 2016).

DISRUPTION, ABANDONMENT AND DISCONTINUITY DURING EM I

The presence of baked clay building material among the pottery retained in 1923 (KSM Evans boxes 834-5) suggests that the destruction of Building J may have been accompanied by fire. This destructive event was followed by a long hiatus in the Central Court area, lasting almost the entire duration of EM I. The general scarcity of pottery of early EM I (Subneolithic) type at Knossos suggests that the site was minimally frequented or abandoned during this phase (Wilson and Day 2000; Hood 2006). The earliest stratified EM I (Knossos XV) is a thin, burnt layer, containing several sherds of mature EM I type at the southwest edge of the hilltop (Early Magazine A, D.VII.21; Macdonald and Knappett 2007). This produced a radiocarbon date (OxA-13420, 4490 $\pm$ 45 BP, 3334-3100 BC, 68.3%, OxCal 4.4; Tomkins 2007, 48) indicating activity early in the last quarter of the fourth millennium BC.

⁴ I thank Simona Todaro for suggesting this parallel.

In the area of the Central Court, Building J was robbed of its stone to the extent that very little of it remained when activity resumed (Knossos XV) with the construction of Building K (Fig. 4). The poor preservation of Building K, specifically the absence of definable use deposits, prevents definitive assessment of its date of construction. Mackenzie observed that “along with large quantities of sherds that could be set down as belonging to a late Neolithic phase”, there were “some others here and there that have more resemblance to the recently discovered black-surfaced pottery of Pyrgos, near Nirou Khani” (Mackenzie 1924: 15). These, he notes, were associated with the walls of Building K. One, a fragment of a chalice with narrow, banded waist (see A. Evans 1928, 10-12, fig. 4), compares closely to examples from late EM I/IIA contexts beyond Knossos (e.g. Gournes cemetery; Papadatos 2021, Type 3), where pottery of EC I/II Kampos Group type also occurs (Wilson and Day 2000). This would suggest that Building K, together with the lower (use) deposit of the Palace Well (i.e. Deposit 1, Hood and Cadogan 2011: 23-5, 28, 43-44; fig. 3.3, type 12; pls. 10-11; Wilson and Day 2000: 39, 51, 55-6), denote a late EM I/IIA phase of reoccupation (Knossos XV).

As Hood has emphasised (2006), there are clear cultural discontinuities between this reoccupation and what came before. While the length of the hiatus between phases XIV and XV essentially explains these, there are hints that the group reoccupying the hill may not have been of local ancestry. According to Mackenzie, the construction technique of Building K is notable for “the lack of the use of ‘kouskouras’ [local clay marl], an old Neolithic tradition still adhered in the foundations... of the earlier house” (Mackenzie 1924, 25). This break in a local tradition encouraged him to view the builders of Building K as newcomers. The distinctive masonry style of Building K, employing large flat stones, also lacks prior parallels at Knossos (Hood 2006). Comparable walls do, however, occur at EM I/IIA sites in other regions (e.g. Kephala Petras, Mesorrachi; Sofianou et al. 2025), suggesting, with the pottery, that these newcomers originated from another region within the island.

CONCLUSIONS

Reassessment of the stratigraphy, formation and phasing of the John Evans excavations at Knossos, ahead of their final publication, provides a rich basis for assessing the nature, phasing and temporality of activity on the hill during the Chalcolithic (Final Neolithic) and EM I periods. These periods are notable for seeing the emergence, from FN IB (Knossos X), of a more discontinuous pattern of occupation, characterised by low-density, shifting, episodic occupation of large, isolated, multi-roomed buildings, implying a much lower resident population than during LN-FN IA. While there are possible hints of building clustering in FN IIA (Knossos XII), this isolated, shifting pattern otherwise seems to be the norm for residential occupation on the hill prior to EM II.

The transition to EB I (Knossos XIV) is notable for substantial investment in reshaping the hill and the establishment of a single preferred alignment for constructed features, irrespective of specific, local configurations of slope. Building J, discussed above, and a second comparable building to the north (Building H.1) form the western edge of a rectangular open-air court, the eastern edge of which is defined by a similarly aligned terrace wall (Tomkins 2012). EM

comparanda for the red earth floor of Building J suggest that this was of special (ceremonial) function, serving a specific group or community. This phase of use ends with the (burnt) destruction of Building J, which is followed by a lengthy period of abandonment or minimal frequentation. Given the significant investment in the hill during phase XIV, potentially by groups resident in the wider landscape, the cessation of activity, early in the development of EB I, is striking and potentially indicative of a wider crisis at this point.

Eventually, centuries later, the hill was re-occupied (Knossos XV) by a group of non-local, but still Cretan origin. If the late EM I pottery present in later construction fills is representative, this late EM I/IIA phase was likely short-lived and of limited extent (Wilson and Day 2000: 53-4, 59). Although it has been suggested that a ceremonial use of the hill may begin at this point (Wilson and Day 2000), the character of the known features (building, well) and material culture would be consistent with low-density, residential occupation of the type familiar from FN IB-II. From EM IIA (Knossos XVI) the hill sees a different pattern of use, which in several key respects (i.e. levelling, terracing, single preferred architectural alignment, aligned multi-roomed buildings, red earth floors and rectangular court) resembles the pattern of use in Knossos XIV (Tomkins 2012; forthcoming). That this same preferred alignment is followed also by the walls of the MM II-LM Palace only adds to the sense that EM I at Knossos is a period of interruption within a longer tradition of ceremonial usage of the Kephala hill, originating at the FN IIB-EB I transition and resuming from EM IIA.

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